



## Charities: Investigate Before You Donate

Every day, charities throughout Illinois work tirelessly to serve the less fortunate. Unfortunately, there are also fraudulent charities that prey upon the generosity of Illinois citizens. Fraudulent charities may make misleading solicitations or solicit for phony causes. These con artists take advantage of citizens and harm legitimate charities.

To ensure that your donation goes to a legitimate charity, give wisely. Ask questions, gather information and donate only when you are satisfied that your money will be used in ways you consider appropriate.

Today, more than 25,000 legitimate charitable organizations are registered with my office. These organizations regularly provide my office with information about their income, expenditures, programs and administrators. If you are interested in learning more about a particular organization, or want to know if a charity that has solicited you for a donation is registered, please contact the Charitable Trust Bureau at 312-814-2595 (TTY: 312-814-3374).

Lisa Madigan  
Attorney General

### TIPS FOR DONATING

- **Find out if the solicitor is a paid fund-raiser.** If the solicitor is paid, a portion of your contribution will pay the salary. Illinois law requires paid fund-raisers to identify themselves as such and to name the charity for which they're soliciting.
- **Ask how much of your contribution will go to the charity.** Illinois law requires professional fund-raisers to disclose this information **if asked**.
- **Request written information.** A legitimate charity will provide you with information outlining its mission, how your donation will be distributed, and proof that your contribution is tax deductible.
- **Pay attention to names.** Some phony charities intentionally use names that sound or look like those of respected, legitimate organizations to mislead you.
- **Contact the charity.** Find out if the organization has authorized the use of its name. If it is not aware of the solicitation, you may be dealing with a sham solicitor.
- **Be skeptical if a solicitor thanks you for a pledge you don't remember making.** Check your records and don't pay for a pledge you didn't make.
- **Refuse high pressure solicitations.** Legitimate charities won't push you to give on the spot.
- **Be wary of charities that offer to pick up your donation.**
- **Don't feel obligated.** If charities send you unsolicited goods such as labels and note cards in the mail, you are under no obligation to contribute and may keep any unsolicited merchandise without donating.

- **Consider fund-raising costs.** When you buy merchandise or receive free goods as part of your donation, these items are paid for out of your contribution. That means less of your donation may go to the charity.
- **Be wary if you are promised sweepstakes winnings in exchange for your contribution.** You never have to donate to be eligible to win.
- **Never pay in cash.** For security and tax record purposes, pay by check. Write the official name of the charity on your check—do not use initials.

## RESOURCES

### Philanthropic Advisory Service Reports

[www.give.org/reports/index.asp](http://www.give.org/reports/index.asp)

Sponsored by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance, this site provides evaluations and profiles of charities that solicit nationally or have national or international program services. Includes descriptions of programs, fund-raising methods and finances.

### Top Rated Charities

[www.charitywatch.org/topgrps.html](http://www.charitywatch.org/topgrps.html)

The American Institutes of Philanthropy (AIP) rates more than 400 charitable organizations using a variety of criteria, including percentage of revenue spent on administrative costs. The AIP website lists those charities which have received their highest rating, grouped by topic.

### GuideStar National Database of U.S. Charities

[www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)

GuideStar provides detailed profiles of more than 640,000 nonprofit organizations in the United States. Search the database by organization name, keyword, city, state, zip code, organization type or revenue size. Sponsored by the nonprofit Philanthropic Research, Inc.

## HOW TO REPORT CHARITY FRAUD

You can help combat charity fraud in Illinois by reporting suspicious solicitations. Whenever possible, keep notes detailing the date and time of the call, the organization's name, and the name of the solicitor. Try to remember their "pitch" as well as any other pertinent information.

To report possible charity fraud, call 312-814-2595 (TTY: 312-814-3374) or contact any of the Attorney General's main or regional offices around the state.

Charitable Trust Bureau  
Office of the Attorney General  
100 West Randolph Street  
Chicago, IL 60601  
(312) 814-2595, TTY: (312) 814-3374

For more information about national charitable organizations:  
BBB Wise Giving Alliance  
4200 Wilson Blvd., Suite 800  
Arlington, VA 22203-1838  
(703) 276-0100